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ABSTRACT

Declines in financial resources and enrollment, and competition for students, are seen to be the principal factors in the future of community colleges. Financial resources have been diminished by cutbacks in federal and state funds, declining enrollment and the underrepresentation of nontraditional students in formula funding, and inflation. Headcount enrollments have been increasing because of the nontraditional student population, but at a decreasing rate. The community colleges are competing for students with proprietary schools as well as other postsecondary institutions, partly due to the recent wider availability of student aid. It is proposed that the challenge to community college administrators is to find underserved groups and new student constituencies whom the college can serve even under the current uncertain conditions of public financing. Among these groups may be the blind and deaf, women over 25, and the educationally disadvantaged. New modes of articulation and cooperation with other agencies will be needed. This will probably affect the hiring practices for faculty and administrators, perhaps adversely. (MSE)

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THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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The Institutions and Activities of Higher Education

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II. INTRODUCTION

Few, if any persons, doubt that the operations of the community colleges will change in the remaining years of this century. But there is almost no agreement about the direction of these changes. Some individuals expect substantial retrenchment in enrollment size, in the scope of noninstructional activities, and in available income. Some expect a steady state in which enrollment will stabilize and income for various programs will keep pace with inflation, or even lag behind the rise in prices. Still others expect continued growth in enrollment, in noninstructional activities, and in income, although at a less frantic pace than was experienced in the 1960's. Clearly, the scenario for the next twenty-five years depends on one's assessment of how the major factors that generally affect higher education will impact the community college segment.

In this paper, I will identify what I believe those general factors to be, assess their impact on the community college system, and finally offer, based on this assessment, my forecast of the future role that community colleges will play in the higher education arena.

III. ASSESSMENT OF THE ABOVE FACTORS ON THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

1. Financial Resources

During the 1960's the predominant theme in community college education, like the other sectors of higher education, was quantitative growth - development of new programs and services and physical expansion of facilities to serve a rapidly expanding student clientele. Two-year colleges gained credibility as comprehensive institutions capable of offering programs and services where none existed before. Resources were plentiful, and staff were added in unprecendented numbers to build new programs or shore up existing ones. The size of the budget was not a critical issue because unallocated funds were always available to support a new program or to cover an unanticipated situation. As a result, community college faculty and administrators came to believe that all emerging needs could be met by constantly expanding financial resources.

Today this view is greatly altered. Community colleges are experiencing either reduced or "no-growth" budgets as a result of the following factors working singly or in combination:

a. The general condition of the economy and the sharp cutback in federal and state funds. Since 1975, the community colleges have fared poorly in the allocation of federal funds to different types of postsecondary education institutions. This is true even though mandatory set-asides for two-year institutions were written in-

to laws such as the Higher Education Facilities Act, the Education Professions Development Act, and the 1968 and 1972 Amendments to the Higher Education Act. An excellent illustration of the underrepresentation of community colleges in the distribution of federal funds is found in a 1975 report of the College Entrance Examination Board, which showed that community college students use federal student aid programs less frequently than their needs would warrant (Gladieux, 1975).

At the state level, twenty-one of thirty-nine states surveyed in 1977 by W. Gary McGuire indicated that community college financing had reached a stabilized condition. Most of the states in this category indicated that this financial condition was the result of declining tax revenue which has limited funds available to all state agencies.

b. The decline in the traditional college-age population and funding formulas that limited or prohibit support for non-traditional students. Declining enrollment does not mean a decline in the total number of students enrolled in community colleges since the headcount enrollment continues to increase, even if at a reduced rate over years past. What is in decline is credit enrollment, usually expressed as Full-Time Equivalencies (FTE) or Average Daily Attendance (ADA). The rising headcount/declining FTE phenomenon has

been succinctly explained in Knoell's (1976) vital study of student persistence. She notes that today's student increasingly is older and oriented toward part-time, continuing education. Simply put, more and more are enrolling in less and less. It is credit or FTE enrollment and not headcount which by funding formula determines the allocation of educational resources in most colleges. Because of this situation, community colleges are in the increasingly difficult circumstance of having to serve ever greater numbers of students with a stable or diminishing pool of staff and material resources.

c. The effects of inflation, particularly rising energy costs, on the operating budgets of community colleges.

It has been estimated that between 1962 and 1969, the purchasing power of state aid for operations went down from $365 per student to $275 and, for capital outlays, from $115 to $88 (Flowers, 1969). This example illustrates conditions throughout the country. No matter what measures are used to dramatize the effects of inflation, the results are the same - the lower purchasing power of the available funds.

2. Enrollment

a. Decline in the enrollment of traditional age group.

Higher education has been amply alerted to the declining numbers of eighteen year olds in our population beginning in 1979. The number of births was nearly four and a half million in 1960 and is estimated to have been over three million in 1975. The number of youth aged eighteen through twenty-one years was nine million in 1960, will be sixteen million in 1980, but will decline to thirteen million in 1990. There is no question that the traditional college-age group in our population will be smaller in the year ahead (Glenny, 1973).

Furthermore, current evidence suggests that the proportion of that age group who decide to undertake a higher education will also decline. It has been estimated that only 20 per cent of the enrollment growth of the 1950's was attributable to population growth, while 80% was due to the increased participation of youth and others in higher education. In the remarkable sixties, the proportions were 45 per cent and 55 per cent, respectively (Glenny, 1973). The drop in participation apparently began in the early 1970's. For men eighteen and nineteen years of age, some 33 per cent were enrolled in higher education in 1960, 44 per cent were enrolled in 1969, and 35 per cent in 1973. For women eighteen and nineteen years of age, the proportion enrolled in higher education was about 23 per cent in 1960, 35 per cent in 1971, and 31 per cent in 1973 (Glenny, 1973).

Various explanations have been given for this apparent drop: the declining labor market demand for college graduates, and the end of selective military service and the consequent end of service deferments based on college enrollment no doubt have had an impact. A less tangible cause could be a loss of personal interest in the intellectual satisfactions of higher education.

Nearly as visible is declining Vietnam veteran enrollment which, only a few years ago, accounted for one-third or more of most community colleges' total enrollment. The current generation of veterans will be virtually nonexistent on the campus in less than five years.

In the case of these declining student markets, the critical factor is not simply a decline in total numbers now apparent. More important, to the community colleges, is the fact that the decline is long term and lasting and not short term and transitional (Batdorf, 1976).

b. Increase in the enrollment of non-traditional students.

There is an increasing number of students as described by Cross in her book, Beyond the Open Door, that are enrolling in community colleges. These students have been out of school for some time, are members of a racial mi-

nority, have had limited success academically in high school, characteristically leaving high school (often without graduating) in the lowest quartile academically.

Because of this latter group, the net headcount enrollment of the community colleges continues to increase, but at a reduced rate over years past.

3. The Impact of Competition on Community Colleges

a. Propriety Schools

Various factors are making private vocational schools stronger competition than in the past for students with occupational objectives. These factors include the new aid available to students attending such schools, their reputation for "no-frills" curricula and good job placement, and their new partnership in postsecondary education as evidenced by their representation on state-level boards and commission for planning and coordination. (Knoell, 1978)

b. Other Schools

Through the federal Basic Educational Opportunity Grant Program and other need-based aid programs, many students who previously enrolled in community colleges for finan-

cial reasons will be able to attend their first choice of college or university as freshmen. Studies have shown that many young people enroll in a community college for lower-division work mainly because the cost is low and they lack funds for tuition and subsistence at other types of institutions. With the differential in costs between community colleges and four-year institutions decreasing, and with new, need-based financial aid available, community colleges may expect to lose students in the growing competition for students among various types of institutions.

4. Collective Bargaining at the Community Colleges

Declining financial resources resulting in increased class sizes, encouragement of multifield teaching, employment of more part-time faculty and the inability to insure that salary will keep pace with inflation have led to the establishment of an increased number of collective bargaining units at community colleges.

5. The Tenure of Faculty Members

The rising tenure ratios within community colleges and their tightening budgets will restrict the ability of the community colleges to address the needs of the communities they serve.

IV. THE FUTURE OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Community colleges have reached their present magnitude, in size and comprehensiveness, largely because they have responded to changing needs and conditions. No other educational institution has responded as quickly or effectively to change. Community colleges were responsive first to the need for new higher education opportunities for increasing numbers of young people unable to enroll in baccalaureate institutions as freshmen. Having met that challenge, the community colleges were then responsive to the special needs of the academically unprepared, the disadvantaged, racial and ethnic minorities; women reentering postsecondary education, the underemployed and the unemployed, the elderly, the handicapped, and others whose needs were to be met in new types of programs and services, by faculty and staff with new backgrounds and skills.

Responsiveness now appears to be leading to retrenchment; that is, cutting back in response to the projection of declining enrollment and financial support. Fewer students or slower growth in enrollments means less funding - which, in turn, is expected to result in fewer faculty and staff, fewer programs, and no new facilities. The challenge of community college administrators is to find underserved groups and new student constituencies, whose needs the community colleges c n meet under the uncertain conditions of public financing which characterize the late 1970's. To do so will re-

quire that the community colleges develop a new perspective on cooperative planning and articulation with other postsecondary institutions and manpower agencies that are also concerned with training for employment, basic education, remediation, and recurrent education for purposes other than employment (Knoell, 1978).

Now that they no longer have to grow in response to demonstrated need, community colleges can plan the kind of student mix they would like to achieve by 2000, together with the program mix to be offered to obtain the desired student mix. Although few campuses or additional buildings will be constructed, community colleges still can plan outreach programs in off-campus facilities, where the desired mix of programs and students can be housed. Administrators may find it more difficult to plan faculty and staff mixes for the year 2000 because of limitations associated with tenure, collective bargaining, and new laws relating to part-time faculty and retirement options. Nevertheless they still have available options (student fees, contracts and grants, state and local funds) for obtaining needed funds for the desired student, program facilities, and faculty mix.

Although community colleges undoubtedly will not abandon their degree and transfer programs, they will surely need to plan programs and services for the large majority of students who will be attempting to achieve highly specific objectives related to their occupational and personal needs. The changing student mix in the communi-

ty colleges may partly explain the decreased resources provided by the states for community college education. Although everyone agrees that lifelong or recurrent education is desirable, there is considerable uncertainty about the funding of such programs. Should they be supported largely by tax revenues and/or appropriations or by student charges? And which agency or institution should provide the programs: the unified school districts, the community colleges, or college and university extension centers (each with a different funding mechanism)? Community college administrators, through improved lobbying efforts, must educate legislators and other government officials that the locus of such funding for the older, part-time nondegree students who are now a significant part of the student mix in the community colleges must remain with the community colleges.

Community colleges will attract new constituencies (for example, the blind and the deaf), they will increase attendance rates among certain constituencies (for example, women over 25 years of age), and they will increase retention rates for selected student groups (for example, by providing support services for the educationally disadvantaged).

Because of this, they will have to monitor enrollment projections to produce a desired student mix over the coming years.

Without denying access or opportunity in an unjust fashion to specific

segments of the community, the college must project the student mix in its plans and priorities for particular programs and services. Basic to such planning is the construction of the desired student profile, in terms of both total enrollment and the proportional representation of various groups: by sex, age, racial and ethnic identification, and socioeconomic status; by enrollment status and educational objective (degree, certificate, transfer, other occupational, personal development, and other); by location (on-campus versus off-campus locations); by place of residence in the college service area (zip code or census tract); and by other variables deemed important to the college.

The community colleges must establish new modes of cooperation with other agencies offering postsecondary educational opportunities in the college service area, including new concepts of articulation. As partners trying to overcome their "junior" image in higher education, community colleges have often used the performance of their transfer students as a major measure of the quality of their instructional programs. Considerable effort has been spent in the pursuit of articulation between courses and programs to ensure the smooth transition of transfer students into the baccalaureate institutions. Roles and functions have been delineated quite clearly as a result: community colleges offering lower-division courses for freshmen and sophomores with transfer objectives, and baccalaureate institutions concentrating on the major and minor, usually in upper division courses. Students in occupational majors were assumed, with

a few exceptions, to be starting and completing preparation in the community colleges for entry-level employment in both associate degree and certificate programs.

In both planning and articulation, community colleges have tended to ignore the noncollegiate institutions and agencies offering postsecondary programs, often to far larger numbers of students than are enrolled in community colleges. These include adult schools, sponsored by unified school districts, area and regional occupational centers, private vocational schools, and educational programs offered by government, business and industry, and the military. Occupational education offered at the secondary school level has also been largely ignored by community colleges, in terms of articulation, probably because of belief that preparation for college should not include such courses. Few would challenge the strong reputation achieved in occupational education achieved in community colleges. However, programs in this area appear to have been planned for a limited clientele: recent high school graduates who enroll full time to prepare for employment.

The programs offered by these various institutions differ in requirements and rewards but have the common objective of preparing students for beginning employment - for example, as auto mechanics, vocational nurses, data processors, and cosmetologists. Multiple opportunities also exist in non-vocational areas for lifelong learners who might enroll in adult schools, community college courses, and/or college and

university extension. The range of courses is very wide - from communication skills to arts and crafts and physical fitness.

Community colleges have rationalized their inattention to competing postsecondary programs on the grounds that rapidly increasing demand for postsecondary education in past years required them to be more responsive than cooperative and that, regardless of the circumstances, there should be a sufficient volume of students and funding for all agencies and institutions. There should be no unnecessary duplication or unhealthy competition, they reasoned, as long as enrollments continued to increase. However, a new era of cooperation among community colleges and other agencies offering postsecondary education is emerging as a result of several conditions. The first is state mandation (or strong encouragement) of regional planning and cooperation, as a condition for program approval and funding. The second is the condition of limited resources, which reduces the community-college incentive to develop new, high-cost occupational programs. In the statutory Regional Adult and Vocational Education Councils in California, for example, community colleges must work with regional occupational centers and programs, adult schools, private vocational schools, and the Comprehenive Educational Training Programs in order to gain approval to offer new programs. State law requires the councils to develop articulation agreements with the objective of making possible the smooth transition of students between institutions and continuous progress in their chosen specialization, while avoiding problems of duplication and inefficiency. State law now also per-

mits community colleges, within the limits of state and local funding, to contract with private vocational schools to provide otherwise unavailable programs for their students. Private vocational schools are also to be included in the administrative structure for the statewide Articulation Conference in California, thus opening the door to transfer between these institutions and community colleges for students who seek the associate degree after completing an occupational program (Knoell, 1978).

Furthermore, community colleges may soon open their degree programs to students who have had roughly comparable experiences in noncredit adult schools and regional occupational centers whose programs have long been regarded as "terminal." There is increasing recognition among community college planners that students - particularly adults- do not always follow the structured curricula planned for them. The alternative to acceptance of diversity on the part of community colleges appears to be state intervention to insist upon the transferability of work, particularly when students have been given financial aid for postsecondary education. There appears to be a growing need for community colleges to engage in cooperative planning and sharing with other postsecondary institutions and to develop new articulation arrangements to make it possible for students to move between different types of institutions in accordance with their own needs and objectives.

The strong local support enjoyed by community colleges and the ability of community colleges to attract non-traditional students will insure, through the year 2000, that enrollments will increase at a modest rate; that income will increase at a rate slightly less than inflation; and that inter-institutional sharing of facilities and programs will occur.

My concerns rest with the impact of these changes in emphasis and policy on the community college faculty.

The needs of the non-traditional students are being met more and more through the employment of part-time faculty.

These faculty members are not on a tenure track, and they do not receive the fringe benefits that accrue to full-time faculty.

This situation provides the administration with increased flexibility, but it also causes discontent among the part-time faculty. Discontent that is resulting in the establishment of collective bargaining units on more and more community college campuses. On the other hand, the tenured faculty members are concerned about the decreasing class loads in their areas of instruction. Thus, they are also interested and supportive of collective bargaining units to protect their tenure rights and real income.

As indicated in an article in the January 28, 1980 issue of the

Chronicle of Higher Education,

> "Faculty members first refuse to recognize the gravity of the new situation and then react in rigidly defensive ways, through collective bargaining and attacks on presidents and trustees, when adjustments are proposed."

With the federal and state governments emphasis on reducing the cost per full-time equivalent (FTE), with the part-time faculty interest in full-time employment, and with the recent graduate looking for employment, the picture looks gloomy. In year 2000, according to the referred article in the Chronicle of Higher Education, there will be far more faculty members 66 and over than there are faculty members 35 and younger. An older faculty-adding to costs; less resilient in adjusting to new fields that come along; farther removed from the age of students.

This situation is resulting in the decline in the number and quality of persons willing to serve as administrators as the positions become more difficult and are subject to more harassment. This condition is occurring at a time when more skillful managers are required. Managers that are knowledgeable in personnel administration and skillful in the act of managing an organization during periods of declining budgets and retrenchment as opposed to growth budgets and expansion.

SUMMARY

The community colleges still have time to plan for an austere future.

Given innovative management, supportive trustees, and a faculty willing to support the goals of the community colleges, at some personal sacrifice, it should be possible to effectively solve the collective bargaining problems without destroying the most desirable feature of the community colleges - the flexibility to respond to the needs of the local community.

In conclusion, the community colleges' ability to attract "new" students, to successfully lobby the governmental and community funding sources, and to timely resolve the collective bargaining and tenure problems make it the sector of higher education with the greatest chance of survival in the 20 years to come.

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